

NEWS FROM:

International Terrorism and Nonproliferation Subcommittee

U.S. Rep. Ed Royce, Chairman

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 29, 2005

Contact: Julianne Smith, 202-225-4111

Royce Statement on U.S. Counter-terrorism Strategy

Hearing discusses the future of our national strategy to combat terrorism

WASHINGTON, D.C. - - Today, the House Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation (ITNP) held a hearing to examine the evolving U.S. counter-terrorism strategy. This is the first of two hearings on this topic. A follow-up hearing with new State Department Coordinator for Counter-terrorism, Ambassador Henry Crumpton, is expected later this year.

At the hearing, ITNP Chairman U.S. Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA-40) issued the following opening statement:

"The transnational terrorist threat facing the United States is rapidly evolving. Since 9/11, as a result of unrelenting U.S. military pressure, al-Qaeda has had to drastically reconfigure. Many now characterize al-Qaeda as a 'movement' or 'ideology,' rather than a formal organization. Some have even described the loose alliance of extremist networks targeting us as a 'globalized insurgency.'

"Some have suggested that U.S. counter-terrorism strategy does not match this evolving threat. While we have had good success in dismantling the formal al-Qaeda network, not enough attention has been paid to countering the ideology fueling this 'movement.' I see this radicalism spreading throughout Africa and Central Asia. Others lament the lack of a sharp strategy along the lines of the 'containment' doctrine that guided the U.S. during the Cold War. The Administration has begun a comprehensive review of its counter-terrorism strategy, some reports indicate, with the intention of updating its *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, released in 2003. Today's hearing is step one in looking at that.

"Much discussion has focused on how to define the enemy. During the summer months, some commentators pointed to a shift in language by senior Administration officials as indicating a new approach towards counter-terrorism. For a short time, the 'global war on terror' was replaced by the awkward 'global struggle against violent extremism.' Some expressed regrets that the new phrasing still made no mention of radical Islam.

"To my mind, the 9/11 Commission got it right when it reported: 'But the enemy is not just "terrorism," some generic evil. This vagueness blurs the strategy. The catastrophic threat at this moment in history is more specific. It is the threat posed by *Islamist* terrorism - especially the al Qaeda network, its affiliates, and its ideology.' This is not merely an issue of semantics. Language choices can have a big impact on U.S. policy, as well as how the American people perceive the threat our nation faces. If the enemy is not clearly identified, then strategies to defeat it are bound to fail. I do not know if the U.S. foreign policy apparatus is comfortable contending with religion, though. For instance, in the *National Security Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, 'Islam' is barely mentioned. Of course, all terrorism is not 'Islamist terrorism,' but most is.

"Today, we will hear about the quickly evolving terrorist threat. The 9/11 Commission usefully observed that our enemy is twofold: the embattled al-Qaeda network and those who have embraced al-Qaeda's message. 'The first enemy is weakened, but continues to pose a grave threat. The second enemy is gathering, and will menace Americans and American interests long after Osama bin Laden and his cohorts are killed or captured.'

"This is a war on many fronts. Some fronts can be pointed to on a map: from Africa with its vast ungoverned areas to Western Europe with its disaffected Muslim youth. There is an informational technology front, where the enemy has excelled, rallying troops and winning converts. As one witness points out, there now exists a 'virtual caliphate' in cyberspace. In the battle of ideas, unfortunately, we're not even in the arena. We are going to need all tools at work, including a much-improved public diplomacy product.

"Despite the evolving and sophisticated threat, there have been no terrorist attacks on U.S. soil since 9/11. This is evidence of some success; on the other hand, major al-Qaeda attacks are often years in planning. I think most everyone agrees that this will be a long confrontation, as the root causes of terrorism are spreading and deep.

"Some may suggest that a recalibration of our counter-terrorism strategy indicates failure or weakness. But revision, given the changing nature, complexity, and relative newness of the threat is understandable. It is required. Mistakes are bound to be made. We should not be afraid to listen either, as I plan on doing today, because no one has all the answers. However, given the proliferation of WMD technology, coupled with terrorists' desire to kill, the window for developing and executing the right counter-terrorism strategy may be closing, requiring urgent efforts on all our parts."

###